

**Agricultural Advisory Committee Meeting  
February 19, 2019 Minutes**

**Attendance:** Michele Cropp, Lori Larson, Patrick Jamison, Ben Butler, Aliza Silver, Pete Driscoll, Jane Evans, Eleanor Leak, Angie McNally

**Staff:** Jeremy Criss

**Agenda items are in bold and minutes are not bolded.**

1. **Call the Meeting to Order and Introductions: 7:13 pm**
2. **Approval of the AAC meeting minutes from January 15, 2019.**

Approved as written. (Evans/Cropp)

3. **The MCFB Michele Cropp, Lonnie Luther, Todd Greenstone, Linda Lewis and Johnny Jamison met with the County Executive Marc Elrich on January 22, 2019. The OAG provided CE briefing documents to help with the meeting. The meeting lasted for over an hour and everyone was encouraged by the discussion. The group came away with the understanding that this County Executive will have a much better open-door policy to discuss a range of agricultural issues and needs of our County farmers.**

The County Executive seemed interested in rustic roads and deer issues and Michele said she thinks that Marc will be a friend of agriculture. He was also interested in hearing about the \$33,473 Jeremy had to cut out of his budget. Elrich encouraged us to reach out to him directly if there are any problems and he will reach out to us directly with any ag issues. He acknowledged the difference between ag and open space folks. Michele said she sent Marc a hand written thank you note for the meeting and the discussion.

4. **The House Bill 20 was heard at the House Ways and Means Committee on January 17, 2019. The House Bill 20 from Delegate Eric Luedtke, which proposes to remove the State Section 13-305 that allows developers to avoid paying the Agricultural Transfer Taxes. Senator Craig Zucker has sponsored SB 344 as the cross-filed with HB20. The Senate Budget and Taxation committee hearing on SB 344 was February 13, 2019. Please see the attached testimony for Jeremy Criss and Michael Jamison.**

Both Senator Zucker and Senator Feldman are cosponsors of SB344. This issue is getting a lot of attention across the state and folks are looking for cases in their counties where properties that are currently being farmed are not ag

assessed, and that are close to the building envelope so that when they are transferred they will not be assessed an ag transfer tax.

There is still some push back from the Maryland Realtors Association. The Maryland Farm Bureau has been going back and forth with them about possible amendments. They may write in a sliding scale percentage that developers have to pay depending on how long they keep the property in non-ag use designation.

- 5. Update ZTA 18-14 Farm Alcohol Production Facilities in the RE-1 and RE-2 Residential zones as an accessory use to farming. The ZTA requires that all types of farm alcohol production in these residential zones must be located a minimum of 25 acres and the property must not be in a planned sewer service category. The Public Hearing was January 15, 2019 and many agricultural groups forwarded letters of support to the County Council. The PHED Committee recommended approval with amendments and the Council approved ZTA 18-14 on February 12, 2019.**

**<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COUNCIL/Resources/Files/zta/2018/ZTA%2018-14.pdf>**

The Council recommended an amendment to ZTA 18-14 that requires the property must also be on a road built to higher standards (arterial road – the snow emergency route roads).

- 6. The Agricultural members of the Agritourism Study Advisory Committee-ASAC met back in December 2018 to prepare responses to recommendations from the consultant. The group forwarded their responses to the consultant's recommendations on January 4, 2019. The MNCPPC is compiling the responses from all members of the ASAC and negotiating with the consultant to come back again for another meeting of the ASAC to be scheduled sometime soon.**

- 7. The Sugarland Broadband Pilot construction along Partnership Road is completed and service hook ups are underway. Comcast is waiving the installation costs to the residents including the long runs up their driveways for hooking up the service. Comcast is now working to schedule construction along the Sugarland Road. We have continued to make progress in obtaining signed easements from some of the holdouts along the pilot. Several residents have expressed interest to assist in replicating the success of the Sugarland Pilot into other areas of the Agricultural Reserve. There will be a ribbon cutting ceremony once the winter weather passes. <https://montgomerycountymd.gov/cable/Sugarland/sugarland-comcast.html>**

Comcast is looking to schedule the second phase of installation. For the first phase, they needed to get drop downs (i.e. pull the power down from the PEPCO pole and activate the system). Comcast has already invested half a million dollars to get the ride on agreements for the poles. The ribbon cutting ceremony will

probably be in March, and there will be a proclamation for Dave Weitzer and Dennis Kamber and we will make sure that Barbara Weitzer and Sherri Kamber will be in attendance.

Lori Larson volunteered to work with Margie Williams, who is the cable franchise manager and Mitsi Herrera to get even more people signed up. Mitsi is applying for a USDA grant for expanding broadband in rural communities and has already identified potential customers based on where the existing network ends. There was a discussion surrounding how satellite service can be challenging at times dependent upon the weather.

- 8. Bob Cissel, Director of Montgomery Agricultural Producers arranged for meetings with each member of the Montgomery County Council on February 6, 2019. Bob extended invitations to other agricultural groups including MCFB-Michele Cropp, MC Agricultural Center-Carl Hobbs, and the Office of Agriculture-Jeremy Criss.**

The group mentioned above met with the new members of the Council which included Evan Glass, Andrew Friedson and Gabe Albornoz and they were very excited about agriculture. They also met with Craig Rice, Hans Riemer and Sidney Katz. They discussed the 4% reduction in OAG budget and the reduced number of school visits for the food, fiber, and you lab. Craig Rice, the chair of the Education Committee, said that the recommended OAG reduction will be discussed further for it to be possibly restored? Several of the Council members liked the idea of touring some farms to gain better understanding of farming operations in the County.

- 9. The Linthicum family received the Governor's Agricultural Hall of Fame Award for this year and were honored on February 7, 2019 during the Taste of Maryland Dinner.**

The dinner was very well attended. Tom Linthicum's remarks were wonderful; he directed them at the Governor's cabinet and the members of the General Assembly, encouraging them to work with us-the Maryland farmers.

The Governor announced a new dairy financial assistance program, to provide financial resources to farmers to help them so that they don't go negative from their feed costs, at the very least.

- 10. Update on the FY19 1.5% Savings Plan for the OAG totals \$14,583. The Savings Plan will negatively impact the number of matching grants the OAG will be able to provide through June 30, 2019 in addition to reducing our marketing outreach for farmers markets and the farm tour. Update on the FY20 Budget Reduction for the OAG totals \$33,473. The Budget Reduction was submitted on January 7, 2019 and the OAG met with the Director of OMB on January 29, 2019. The County is recommending the contract for Maryland Agricultural Education**

**Foundation-MAEF and Montgomery County Public Schools-MCPS be reduced by \$33,473. This reduction will reduce the number of schools the Mobile Science Lab-Food Fiber and you can visit each year from 27 schools down to 13 schools.**

It appears that Elrich will accept what the OAG is recommending. Jeremy is waiting to hear back about his proposed reduction of the food, fiber, and you lab. OAG has lost \$130,000 in operating funds in the past four years since becoming OAG. OAG has 8.5 FTEs. Jeremy will bring to the next AAC meeting an update on the OAG funding history FY16 to present.

- 11. The MNCPPC submitted letters to farmers that lease park land announcing a pesticide prohibition for using Glyphosate-Round Up as part of their farming operation. The OAG contacted the Director of Parks, Mike Riley requesting the specific authority that MNCPPC is using to enforce this pesticide prohibition. The MNCPPC responded that all farmers that received the letter should discard the instructions at this time. The OAG sent follow up letter to each of the farmers that received the MNCPPC letters and copied MNCPPC staff. Michele Grace from MNCPPC called to explain that Parks will not be sending another letter to the tenant farmers and business as usual for these farmers moving forward. On Wednesday the OAG sent out a second letter to the farmers that lease Park property explaining to them business as usual.**

The federal and state governments are legally charged with regulating pesticides. This is why the county government is still involved in litigation because the Attorney General determined the county pesticide bill was attempting to preempt state law.

Jeremy is following up with farmers who received the letter. He has requested that MNCPPC follow up with them with further instructions to disregard the initial letter. The farmers want a letter directly from MNCPPC because the County Parks Department owns the farms that they are leasing. The response letter from the OAG was a nice gesture but OAG does not have legal standing.

- 12. The Annual Farm Bureau Day in Annapolis was on Wednesday January 30, 2019 and Paula Linthicum did an excellent job of scheduling individual meetings between the MCFB representatives and members of the Montgomery County Delegation. We also attended the Governor Hogan's State of the State speech.**

One issue we encountered was that February 4<sup>th</sup> was the deadline for dropping bills, and so on that day 400 bills dropped. The Farm Bureau Day in Annapolis was before they were dropped, so it was hard to have a message about them. There is normally a total of 4,000 bills introduced annually in Annapolis.

- 13. The Maryland DNR will be conducting public meetings to promote their 15-year Deer Management Plan and revised Regulations. The public meeting for Central MD is February 21, 2019 in Owings Mills. The DNR is recommending regulations**

**that will negatively impact deer management in Montgomery County. Written comments to the MD-DNR are due by February 28, 2019. Please see the email message attached. <https://news.maryland.gov/dnr/2019/01/28/public-input-sought-on-white-tailed-deer-management/>**

Last June we were asked by DNR to comment on their proposed hunting regulations for the 2018-2019 hunting season. AAC sent a letter with comments saying that we don't support removing the unlimited bag limits of deer for bow hunters down county. Now they are having public meetings to examine the proposed rules and to develop a 15-year Deer Management Plan. Montgomery County needs to be treated differently than other rural counties because we have highly urbanized County with one of highest population of deer. The DNR says they're removing the unlimited bag limits because there's a connotation that deer are vermin. The DNR is funded by various fees on ammunition including hunting, fishing and crabbing licenses and they are not funded by tax supported funding. We expect these factors led MD-DNR to keep the deer population high for a future source of income to fund their agency.

The DNR did reintroduce the deer population into our state after it was decimated in 1900. The DNR owns the deer as nature resource property; they are wards of the state and you must pay for a license to kill their deer. Some farms would argue that we should file a class action lawsuit against the state for not managing or controlling their property.

Jeremy is going to reiterate the same items from our June 20 letter. Motion to send the letter passed. (Cropp/Larson) *Please note the Jeremy drafted a letter that was signed by the President of the County Council and the County Executive and remitted to Paul Peditto of the MD-DNR.*

- 14. The National Agriculture Day is March 14, 2019. On Tuesday March 12, 2019, the County Council will be conducting a continental breakfast at 8:30 am for farmers to attend and then participate with a County Council Proclamation to celebrate National Agriculture Day. I encourage you to attend and let me know if you want to join us.**

Daniela Moya sent us all an email and we were supposed to RSVP for a head count.

- 15. Update on the Appointments needed for the AAC. January 23, 2019 Deadline. Please see the attached chart of all the AAC members and the status of their appointments.**

We reviewed the terms and will go over again at the next meeting when we have more information.

- 16. Additional Business**

- Ag Roundtable. Ken Reichert, Ben Cardin's assistant will be convening an ag round table on March 15 with 20 farmers to generally discuss farming operations and any concerns that he may be able to address. For example, the H2A visa for seasonal migratory labor. Last year they changed the system from a first come first served lottery system so that people who have longstanding relationships with the same workers for decades suddenly didn't get any. We may also discuss expanding broadband/5G into rural areas and federal funding for implementation of conservation programs that will protect the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.
- Hotline #4 of the MCFB includes information about the new minimum wage bill at the state level. It would remove the exemption for agricultural workers. This is a big concern.

17. **Adjournment** – motion to adjourn passed at 8:51 pm. (Silver/Larson)